

#2696

RECEIVED

From: Charissa Kinzler [kinzlercd@yahoo.com]
Sent: Wednesday, May 07, 2008 8:47 AM
To: IRRC
Subject: Oppose Graduation Exams

MAY - 7 REC'D

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

11:30 AM

The Boards of Directors of the South Fayette Township School District (where I teach) and West Allegheny School District (where I reside) recently passed a resolution opposing the proposed Graduation Competency Assessments. I join them in urging you to oppose the State Board of Education's proposal to enact Graduation Competency Assessments and any other regulation or legislation that usurps the authority of local school districts to determine whether their students have earned a high school diploma.

There are numerous reasons I oppose the GCA proposal, but first and foremost I do not believe that standardized tests are the best determination of student achievement. The thought of denying students a high school diploma - which has long-term negative effects on their lives - because they didn't score "proficient" on a statewide test truly concerns me.

A paper and pencil standardized test is a very imperfect measure of what students have learned. Current regulations require each school district and area vocational technical school to create a local assessment system, of which local graduation assessments are a part. Local graduation assessments must be aligned with the state academic standards and be used to determine the degree to which students are achieving the standards. Local assessment systems, including the local graduation assessments, must include a variety of assessment strategies, including portfolios and research papers, presentations, projects and assignments, results of exams, scientific experiments, works of art, and musical or theatrical performances. These types of assessments provide a richer, more accurate and fairer measure of what students know than can a few paper-and-pencil tests. The state should not override these "local assessments" with one-size-fits-all standardized tests.

Dropout rates have increased significantly in states that have begun to use a high stakes exit exam. (Warren, J.R., Kulick, R.B., & Jenkins, K.N. 2006. High school exit examinations and state-level completion and GED rates, 1975 through 2002. Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis, V28, N2: 131-152) (Dee, T.S. & Jacob, B.A. 2006. Do high school exit exams influence educational attainment or labor market performance? Social Science Research Network, April) (Radcliffe, J. & Mellon, E. May 12, 2007. TAKS tests cost 40,000 Texas seniors chance to graduate, Houston Chronicle.) (FairTest Examiner. January 2007. Exit exam update: WA, TX, CA, AZ, MA). There are costs, both human and financial, of putting kids out on the street who are willing to come to school, want to come to school, and want to do their work, but know they are not going to do well on paper-and-pencil standardized tests. Minority and ELL students have been especially hard hit.

Career and technical education students would be disproportionately harmed by the GCA proposal, and current job trends show our economy is in more of a demand for skilled labor than college educated students. Students in career and technical centers spend much of their time learning specific professions. While math content is woven through some vocational courses, it is in a different format than is provided in an academic Algebra II class. Career and technical education students take professional exams in the areas in which they have been trained. Yet, both the student who takes a college preparatory, academic Algebra II class, and the student who learns the practical application of Algebra II concepts in his or her profession would be judged on the same academic Algebra II test.

No formal cost analysis of developing, distributing, and administering GCAs has been provided, but it is clear that the minimum costs will run into the tens of millions of dollars. In his 2008-09 budget proposal, Governor Rendell proposed spending \$15 million for the development of three of the 10 required GCAs. These costs will increase significantly because the GCAs must be administered at least three times per year, which will require three different versions of each test. The expense is even greater when the cost of providing remediation in the various components of all of the tests is added. In the end, hundreds of millions of dollars are at stake -- all for a type of testing system that has not been shown to improve student achievement but has been shown to have negative effects on student dropout rates, on curriculum offerings, and on the success of minority student populations.

5/7/2008

We believe there are more important places for the Commonwealth to put its resources. Pennsylvania could follow the example of several states that have begun to align their standards according to the work done by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills. This organization, which was formed via a collaboration between educators and business leaders, is developing standards and assessments for competencies that include collaboration, innovation, creativity, communication, and critical thinking skills.

These critical competencies are taught in classes such as music or art. Research has shown that students across the country are losing opportunities to learn these competencies as school districts are forced to shift time away from these subjects in order to prepare students to pass high-stakes tests. Please do not allow that to happen in Pennsylvania! Talk to your colleagues on the Education Committee and ask them to oppose the GCA proposal. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Charissa Kinzler

236 Hastings Avenue

Oakdale, PA 15071

Be a better friend, newshound, and know-it-all with Yahoo! Mobile. [Try it now.](#)